

**Testimony of the National Center for Lesbian Rights
Washington Senate Committee on Early Childhood Hearing
HB 2307**

Good afternoon Chair Gesler and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of HB 2307. My name is Samantha Ames, and I am a Staff Attorney at the National Center for Lesbian Rights and the coordinator of our #BornPerfect campaign to end conversion therapy. NCLR is a national nonprofit legal organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families. Our youth project was founded in 1993 specifically to address the mistreatment of LGBT youth in the mental health system. I have seen firsthand the devastating impact on parents and families when they are misled by state-licensed professionals who give them false information that therapy can change their child's sexual orientation or gender identity. Tragically, not all those children survive.

In 2009, the American Psychological Association reviewed all the data on conversion therapy, and concluded that there is no scientific evidence that such efforts are effective, and significant evidence that they are harmful—especially for children, and linked to dramatically increased rates of depression, substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, isolation, and even suicide.

Because these practices have no scientific basis, provide no benefits, and carry such high risks, every one of the nation's leading medical and mental health associations have issued policy statements condemning them. Just weeks ago, a New Jersey court concluded that "any expert opinion based on the initial premise that homosexuality is a mental disorder or abnormal is unreliable and . . . barred" and went on to rule that professional claims that being LGBT is a curable mental disorder constitute consumer fraud. Just weeks ago, the Surgeon General, Vice President, and President all publicly condemned conversion therapy and came out in strong support of state bills just like HB 2307. Even the United Nations Committee Against Torture has pressured the United States to address the recent resurgence in conversion therapy.

NCLR has helped defend laws like this before two circuit courts, both of which have concluded that these regulations are entirely constitutional. This bill will not affect the ability of minors to seek any type of medically sound therapeutic treatment. Like every other law that regulates licensed professionals, it will only ensure that state-licensed mental health providers cannot subject minor patients to dangerous, ineffective, and discredited practices—and cannot defraud loving parents who would never knowingly place their children at risk of such serious harms, and who count on the law to ensure state-licensed professionals keep their kids safe.

Working closely with survivors of conversion therapy, I know all too well that this bill is a matter of life and death. Medical professionals bearing Oregon state's seal of approval are using the trust their license engenders to teach children that who they are is wrong, that their identity can be blamed on repressed sexual abuse or close family relationships, and even that they can be trained out of their identity with painful aversive conditioning. The recent suicide of Leelah Alcorn, a transgender teenage girl who said that being forced into conversion therapy made her feel more isolated and rejected, has been a wake-up call to much of the country that we need to act now to protect our children from an industry that profits from their pain. HB 2307 would protect the most vulnerable among us from being told that who they are is wrong and protect families from the agony of discovering too late that they have been defrauded by a trusted professional.

We therefore strongly urge you to support of HB 2307 and send a message to all children that they are safe to be who they are in the state they call home.